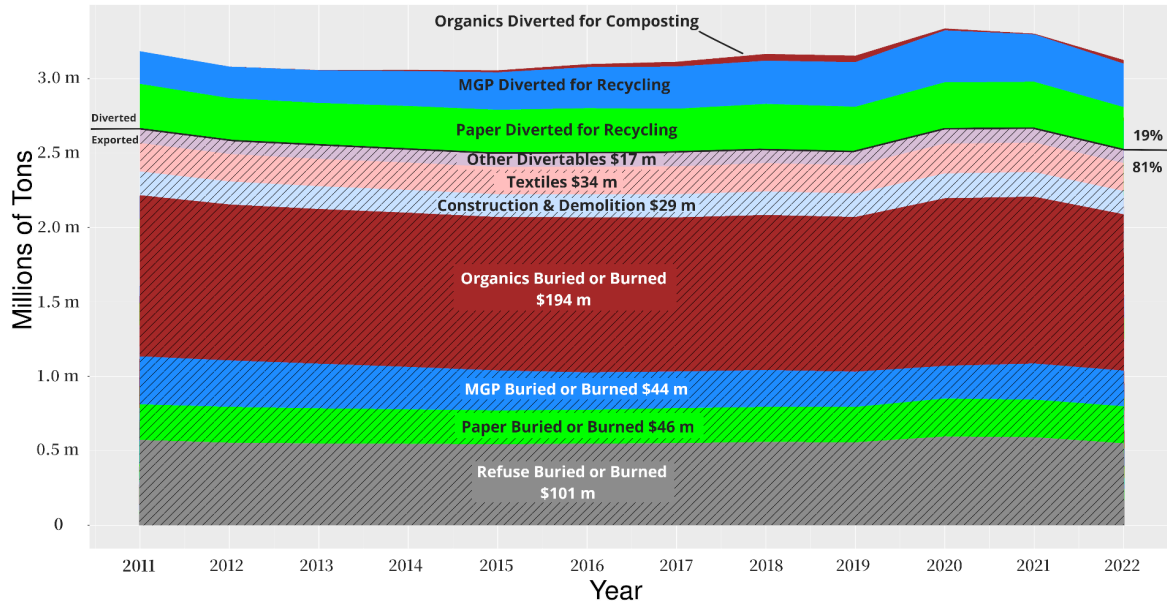




# New York City Has Not Made a Long Term Commitment to Zero Waste

*How The City Wastes Our Tax Dollars Incinerating and Landfilling Resources* <sup>1a, 1b</sup>



## New York City Wastes Valuable Resources

In 2015, the City of New York announced a plan to send zero waste to landfill and incinerators by 2030 (0x30). But since then, the City has inadequately funded zero waste solutions and has been steadily exporting over 80% of discards rich in recyclables, organics and reusables to landfills and incinerators far and wide. In 2019 the majority of the City's exports were recyclable.<sup>1a, 1b</sup>

42% of the exports were organic material<sup>2</sup> costing \$194 million in 2022.<sup>3</sup>

19.3% of the exports were paper, metal, glass, and plastic costing<sup>4</sup> \$90 million in 2022 for disposal.<sup>5</sup>

When the City redirects the export funds to composting and reuse infrastructure, more effective educational programs, and more waste prevention initiatives it would create jobs and reduce pollution and climate impacts. The City would also benefit by selling recyclable resources, and reducing environmental costs of air and water pollution and carbon emissions.

## The City Abandoned its Last Solid Waste Management Plan and 0x30

The opening statement of the 2006 NYC Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) says: "this SWMP addresses:... Waste Prevention and Recycling, Long Term Export and Commercial Waste." But instead of funding Waste Prevention and Recycling initiatives that would have supported the 0x30 goal, the City's funds have gone to Long Term Export and Commercial Waste. In fact, the City spends almost **10 times as many taxpayer dollars** for export to disposal vs. zero waste initiatives. The upward trend of City spending on Waste Export and bukis for zero waste spending shows<sup>6</sup>:

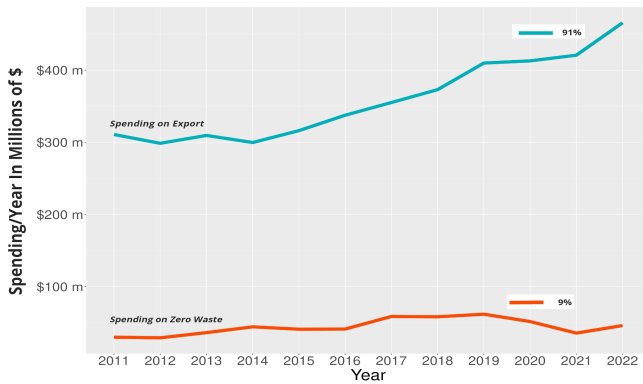
\$465.9 million for Waste Export and \$46.1 million for zero waste in FY2022

91% of spending: Export to disposal

9% for zero waste

More is spent on export, and less on zero waste solutions than when the City committed to zero waste and the disparity is increasing<sup>7</sup> (see graph below). Instead of appropriately funding zero waste programs, on Earth Day 2019 the City abandoned the 0x30 plan<sup>8</sup> while inadequately funding targeted educational and motivational outreach.

## Budgetary Commitment to 0x30<sup>9</sup>



### Long Term Waste Export

The graph below illustrates the duration, in years, and aggregate budgetary commitment of the largest Long Term Waste Export contracts with three vendors. The total remaining commitment from 2020 to 2037 could be in excess of \$6.8 billion.<sup>10</sup> Imagine if even half of this money went to establish reuse and composting infrastructure, motivating education and outreach to maximize participation, enforcement, and other zero waste solutions?

### Largest NYC Long Term Contracts<sup>11</sup>

Waste Management (landfill) ~\$5.5 Billion from ~2008 - 2036
Covanta (Incineration) ~\$3 Billion from ~2013 - 2035
Allied Waste (landfill) ~\$0.5 Billion from ~2006 - 2026

### Export Costs Grow While Zero Waste Plummet

Alarmingly, since 2015, export costs have grown 64%, even though generation rates have been constant, with most of the increase due to inflation and other factors.<sup>12</sup> In the same period, zero waste costs have remained relatively flat between \$41 and 58 million / year, a tenth of export costs.<sup>13</sup>

NYC IBO calculated that if the City captures and processes all 1 million tons of organic waste produced annually, as much as half of it could be composted. Based on the price of \$10 per cubic yard that DSNY currently charges for compost for use in landscaping and farming, this would be worth an estimated \$12.5 million/year revenue.<sup>14</sup>

When the City announced 0x30 in 2015, it had already tied up \$305.40 million/yr in binding export contracts (lasting up to 30 years), money that could have been directed to zero waste programs.<sup>15</sup> The waste export contracts are now \$478.22M /FY24.<sup>16</sup>

In 2023, the City Council passed zero waste laws<sup>17</sup> which require keeping resources here for reuse, recycling and composting. The State's Climate Act<sup>18</sup> requires reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. EPA data shows that zero waste solutions can address almost 50% of carbon emissions.<sup>19</sup>

To comply with the zero waste laws, the City must spend much more on zero waste initiatives. But in 2023 the Mayor cut funding to all community composting initiatives (\$15 million), collection and composting of curbside organics (\$4.8 million)<sup>20</sup> and cut \$4.1 million from education & outreach.<sup>21</sup> This \$24 million cut represents 42% of the FY24 budget for waste prevention, reuse, and recycling, but only 5% of the FY24 export budget.<sup>22</sup>

### Recommendations to Transition From Long Term Waste Export to 90% diversion by 10 years

The City must comply with the new zero waste laws and achieve 90% diversion in 10 years (90 x 10) by taking the following actions:

- **Do not sign** "Put or Pay" export/ disposal contracts that penalize the City for maximizing Zero Waste solutions.
- Create long-term contracts for organics processing and find easily accessed markets for anaerobic biogas and agricultural uses.
- Ban organics to landfills, and annually measure organics going to landfills and methane emissions from landfills and co-digesters used by NYC.
- Legislate a requirement that all export disposal contracts be flexible, to enable the City to withhold (without penalty) tonnage to allow for extraction of reusable, recyclable and organic materials to maximize progress towards zero waste.
- City Council and Comptroller must review existing contracts annually for compliance with the above flexibility requirement and ensure that the contract would provide sufficient progress towards the timely transition to 90% by 10 years before DSNY renews or renegotiates them.